



# Portable fire extinguishers can save lives and property if used correctly

Your first priority is to evacuate everyone and call 911!

A fire extinguisher can be your best defense against a small fire that has just begun to burn. It can buy you enough time to get out of a burning building, and it can extinguish a fire entirely if used properly.

## Extinguishers have their limits

A portable fire extinguisher can save lives and property by putting out a small fire or containing it until the fire department arrives. However, portable extinguishers are not designed to fight a large or spreading fire. Even against small fires, they are useful only under the right conditions:

- An extinguisher must be the right type for the fire.
- An extinguisher must be large enough for the fire at hand. It must be available and in working order, fully charged.
- The operator must know how to use the extinguisher quickly, without taking time to read the directions during an emergency.
- The operator must be strong enough to lift and operate the extinguisher.

## Your extinguisher must fit the fire

Different types of extinguishers are designed for different types of fires.

- **TYPE A:**  
Ordinary combustibles:  
Wood, cloth, paper, rubber, many plastics, and other common materials that burn easily.
- **TYPE B:**  
Flammable liquids:  
Gasoline and other flammable liquids, oil, grease, tar, oil-based paint, lacquer, and flammable gas.
- **TYPE C:**  
Electrical equipment:  
Energized electrical equipment, including wiring, fuse boxes, circuit breakers, machinery, and appliances.

Using an extinguisher that's not created for the fire you are fighting may make the fire worse! It is particularly

dangerous to use water or a Type A extinguisher on a grease or electrical fire.

Multipurpose extinguishers are rated for more than one type of fire. An ABC extinguisher puts out most types of fires that could start in your home - wood, paper, cloth, flammable liquid and electrical fires.

(over for more information)



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## Buy and maintain extinguishers carefully

A fire extinguisher should be "listed" or "labeled" by an independent testing laboratory. Remember that extinguishers need care and must be recharged after every use. Your extinguishers should also be inspected annually by a certified company.

Each extinguisher should be installed in plain view near an escape route and away from potential fire hazards such as heating appliances.

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## Should you fight the fire?

Before you consider fighting a fire...

- Make sure everyone has left the building or is leaving.
- Make sure the fire department has been called.

Never fight a fire if even one of the following is true.

- The fire is spreading beyond the immediate area in which it started or is already a large fire.
- The fire could block your escape route.
- You are unsure of the proper operation of the extinguisher.
- You doubt that the extinguisher you are holding is designed for the type of fire at hand or is large enough to fight the fire.

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## If you do fight the fire, remember the word PASS:

- **PULL** the pin. Some extinguishers require releasing a lock latch, pressing a puncture lever, or some other motion.
- **AIM** low. Point the extinguisher nozzle (or its horn or hose) at the base of the fire.
- **SQUEEZE** the handle. This releases the extinguishing agent.
- **SWEEP** from side to side. Discharge the agent from side to side at the base of the fire until it appears to be out. Watch the fire area. If fire breaks out again, repeat use of the extinguisher.

Most portable extinguishers work according to these directions, but some do not. Read and follow the directions on your extinguisher on each one if you have more than one make or model.

Protect yourself at all times! Stay low. Avoid breathing the heated smoke and fumes or the extinguishing agent. If the fire starts to spread or threatens your escape route, get out immediately.

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## An ounce of prevention

The Howard County Department of Fire and Rescue Services is committed to providing fire prevention information for your safety. We believe that preventative education along with a professional commitment by our firefighters is your family's best defense against fire. If you have questions or would like more information about fire safety, call or write the Office of the Fire Marshal.



**Howard County**  
M A R Y L A N D

**Howard County Fire  
and Rescue Services**

Office of the Fire Marshal  
6751 Columbia Gateway Dr.  
Columbia, MD 21046

**410-313-6040**

All Howard County offices  
may be called by individuals  
who use TTYs through the  
Maryland Relay Service 711